

4.4 Exercises

- 1 Does your language have sequences of two, three, four or more consonants? If so, list the ones which are similar to English sequences.
- 2 Does your language have stop + stop sequences? Practise again the examples on p. 69.
- 3 Be sure that you can distinguish the following: spy, espy; state, estate; scape, escape; support, sport; succumb, scum; polite, plight; terrain, train; below, blow; strange, estrange; ascribe, scribe; esquire, squire; astute, stewed; ticket, ticked; wrapped, rapid, wrap it.
- 4 Does your language have nasal explosion (p. 70) or lateral explosion (p. 72)? Practise those examples again.
- 5 Practise again all the other examples in this chapter, being very careful to follow the instructions given. Finish with the longer sequences on p. 77.

5 The vowels of English

Vowels are made by voiced air passing through different mouth-shapes; the differences in the shape of the mouth are caused by different positions of the tongue and of the lips. It is easy to see and to feel the lip differences, but it is very difficult to see or to feel the tongue differences, and that is why a detailed description of the tongue position for a certain vowel does not really help us to pronounce it well.

Vowels must be learned by *listening and imitating*: I could tell you that the English vowel /ɔ:/ as in *saw* is made by rounding the lips and by placing the back of the tongue in a position mid-way between the highest possible and the lowest possible position, but it would be much more helpful if I could simply say the sound for you and get you to imitate me. Since I cannot do this I must leave the listening and imitating to you. So spend some of your listening time on the vowels.

As I said at the beginning of chapter 3 English speakers vary quite a lot in their vowel sounds; the vowels used by an Australian, an American and a Scotsman in the word *see* are all different, but they are all recognized quite easily as /i:/. So the actual sounds that you use for the English vowels are not so important as the differences that you make between them. There must be *differences between* the vowels, and that is what we will concentrate on

5.1 Simple vowels

/i:/, /ɪ/, /e/

In your language you will have a vowel which is like the English /i:/ in *see*, and one which is like the English /ʌ/ in *sun*, and almost certainly one which is like the English /e/ in *get*. They may not be *exactly* the same as the English vowels you hear in listening to English, but they will do for a starting-point. Say the words *bi:d bead* and *bed bed* several times and listen carefully to the sound of the vowels; then try to say a vowel which is *between* the other two, and different from both, not *bi:d* and not *bed*, but . . . *bɪd* – that will be the vowel in *bid*. You need

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three different vowels for the three words *bead*, *bid* and *bed*. Be sure that the middle vowel is *different* and *between* the other two: one thing which will help you to distinguish /i:/ from /ɪ/ is that /i:/ is longer than /ɪ/ as well as different in the quality of the sound. Practise those three words (and listen for them in English) until you are sure that you can keep them separate. The most likely difficulty is that you will confuse /i:/ with /ɪ/, so be sure that /ɪ/ is nearer in quality to /e/ and that it is always shorter than /i:/.

Remember that when the vowels are followed by a strong consonant they are shorter than when they are followed by a weak consonant, so that *beat*, *bit* and *bet* all have shorter vowels than *bead*, *bid* and *bed*, but even so the vowel /i:/ is always longer than the vowels /ɪ/ and /e/ in any one set. Now practise the following sets and pay attention to both the length of the vowels and their quality:

li:d lead	lɪd lid	led led
wi:t wheat	wɪt wit	wet wet
bɪ:n been	bɪn bin	ben Ben
tʃi:k cheek	tʃɪk chick	tʃek check
fi:l feel	fil fill	fel fell
rɪ:tʃ reach	rɪtʃ rich	rɛtʃ wretch

/e, æ, ʌ/

Now you need another vowel between /e/ and /ʌ/, that is the vowel /æ/. Say the words *bed bed* and *bʌd bud* several times and be sure that your mouth is quite wide open for the vowel of *bʌd*. Listen to the vowels carefully and then try to say a vowel which is *between* those two, a vowel which sounds a bit like /e/ and a bit like /ʌ/ but which is different from both. You *must* have different vowels in *bed*, *bad* and *bud*. Practise those three words until you can always make a difference between them; they all have comparatively short vowels so that length differences will not help you here.

Practise the following sets and be sure that each word really sounds different:

ten ten	tæn tan	tʌn ton
bet bet	bæt bat	bʌt but
pen pen	pæn pan	pʌn pun
seks sex	sæks sacks	sʌks sucks
ded dead	dæd Dad	dʌd dud
meʃ mesh	mæʃ mash	mʌʃ mush

Simple vowels

/i:, ɪ, e, ə, ʌ/

Now try all five of these vowels in the sets given below: you will see that there are gaps in some of the sets, where no word exists, for instance there is no word *lek*; but for practice you can fill in the gaps too. Some of the words are rather uncommon, but don't worry about the meanings just be sure that the vowel sounds are different:

bi:d bead	bi:d bid	bed bed	bæd bad	bʌd bud
lik leak	lɪk lick	hel hell	hæl Hal	hʌl hull
hi:l heel	hɪl hill	ten ten	tæn tan	tʌn ton
tɪ:n teen	tɪn tin	nit knit	net net	næt gnat
ni:t neat	nɪt knit	list least	lest lest	nʌt nut
li:t least	lɪst list	rim rim	ræm ram	lʌst lust
ri:m ream	rɪm rim	bit bit	bet bet	rʌm rum
bi:t beat	bɪt bit			bʌt but

/ə, ɔ:, ʊ/

In England when the doctor wants to look into your mouth and examine your throat he asks you to say *Ah*, that is the vowel /ə:/, because for this vowel the tongue is very low and he can see over it to the back of the palate and the pharynx. So if you have no vowel exactly like /ə:/ in your language you may find a mirror useful keep your mouth wide open and play with various vowel sounds until you find one which allows you to see the very back of the soft palate quite clearly; this will be similar to an English /ə:/, but you must compare it with the /ə:/ vowels that you hear when you listen to English and adjust your sound if necessary. Remember that /ə:/ is a long vowel. The short vowel /ʊ/ is a bit like /ə:/ in quality though of course they must be kept separate. For /ʊ/ the lips may be slightly rounded, for /ə:/ they are not. Try the following sets:

la:k luck	la:k lark	lo:k lock
kʌd cud	ka:d card	kʊd cod
dʌk duck	da:k dark	dʊk dock
lʌst lust	la:st last	lɒst lost
bʌks bucks	ba:ks barks	bʊks box
kʌp cup	ka:p carp	kʊp cop

/ɒ, ɔ:, ʊ, u:/

In your language there will be a vowel which is similar to the English

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/u:/ in *two*. The /u:/ in English, like /i:/ and /ɑ:/, is always longer than the other vowels. Between /ɒ/ and /u:/ you need to make two other vowels, /ɔ:/, a long one, as in /lɔ:/ *law*, and /ʊ/, a short one, as in /pʊt/ *put*. For /ɔ:/ the mouth is less open than for /ɒ/ and the lips are more rounded, but /ɔ:/ is nearer in quality to /ɒ/ than to /u:/. For /ʊ/ the lips are also rounded, but the sound is nearer in quality to /u:/. All four vowels, /ɒ, ɔ:, ʊ, u:/, must be kept separate, and the differences of length will help in this. Try the following sets:



ʃɒd shod	ʃɔ:d shored	ʃʊd should	ʃu:d shoed
kɒd cod	kɔ:d cord	kʊd could	koo:d cooed
wɒd wad	wɔ:d ward	wʊd would	woo:d wooed
lɒk lock	lɔ:k look	lʊ:k Luke	
pɒl Poll	pɔ:l Paul	pʊl pull	poo:l pool

/ɜ:, ə:/

The vowel /ɜ:/ as in /hɜ:/ *her* is a long vowel which is not very close in quality to any of the other vowels and usually sounds rather vague and indistinct to the foreign learner. You must listen to the vowel especially carefully and try to imitate the indistinctness of it (though to an English listener it sounds quite distinct!). Two things will help: keep your teeth quite close together and do not round your lips at all – smile when you say it! The two commonest mistakes with /ɜ:/ are, first, to replace it by /er/ or by some vowel in your own language which has lip-rounding but which is not likely to be confused with any other English vowel, and second, and more important, it is replaced by /ɑ:/ by Japanese speakers and speakers of many African languages and others. In the first case there is no danger of misunderstanding although the vowel will sound strange; in the second case there is danger of misunderstanding, since words like /hɜ:t/ *hurt* and /ha:t/ *heart* will be confused.

In your listening-time pay special attention to /ɜ:/ and experiment (always with teeth close together and a smile on your face) until you approach the right quality; then make sure that you can distinguish it from /ɑ:/ which has the teeth further apart in the following pairs:



pɜ:s purse	pɑ:s pass	bɜ:n burn	ba:n barn
hɜ:d heard	hɑ:d hard	fɜ:m firm	fɑ:m farm
pɜ:tʃt perched	pɑ:tʃt parched	lɜ:ks lurks	la:ks larks

/ə/

The vowel /ə/ in *bənə:nə banana* is the commonest of the English

Simple vowels

vowels and is a short version of /ɔ:/, It is particularly short and indistinct when it is not final, e.g. in əgen *again*, kənteɪn *contain*, pəʊstmən *postman*. In final position, that is before a pause, as in betə *better*, eɪʃə *Asia*, kɒlə *collar*, the vowel sounds more like /ʌ/, though it is not usually so clear.

There are two main difficulties with this vowel: first, to identify it, that is, to know when it is this vowel you should be aiming at; and second, to get the right quality. In the first case, do not be deceived by English spelling: there is no single letter which always stands for this vowel, so rely on your ear – listen very carefully and you will hear dozens of examples of /ə/ in every bit of English you listen to. In the second case, it is often useful to think of leaving out the vowel altogether in words such as kəndem *condemn*, sætədɪ *Saturday*, dʒentlmən *gentleman*, where /ə/ comes between consonants. Of course, you will not really leave out the vowel, but you will have a minimum vowel and that is what /ə/ is. Then in initial position, as in ətempt *attempt*, əkaunt *account*, əbzə:v *observe*, you must again keep it very short and very obscure. But in final position it need not be so short and it may be more like /ʌ/, with the mouth a little more open than in other positions.

Try the following examples:

In medial position



pəhæps	perhaps	kənteɪn	contain
entətərn	entertain	ɪmbærəs	embarrass
dɪnəz	dinners	hɪndəd	hindered
æmətɜ:	amateur	glæmərəs	glamorous
kʌmfətəbl̩	comfortable	kəmpənənt	component
ɪgnərənt	ignorant	kærəktəz	characters
ʌndəstænd	understand	menəs	menace
pa:rət	pilot	terəb̩l̩	terrible
pɜ:mənənt	permanent	kəreɪdʒəs	courageous

In initial position



əber	obey	ətend	attend
əlaʊ	allow	əbstrəkt	obstruct
əmaʊnt	amount	ətʃi:v	achieve
ədɔ:	adore	əkaunt	account
ənɔ:	annoy	əsard	aside
əpru:v	approve	əgri:	agree

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əpriə appear
əfens offence

ədʒə:n adjourn

In final position

su:nə	sooner
meʒə	measure
sʌlfə	sulphur
æfrɪkə	Africa
pɜ:sə	Persia
flætərə	flatterer
kʌlə	colour
pɪktʃə	picture
mɜ:dərə	murderer

seɪlə	sailor
kɔ:lə	collar
ʃəʊfə	chauffeur
əmerɪkə	America
kænədə	Canada
ədmərərə	admirer
zefə	zephyr
tʃainə	China
kəmpəuzə	composer

More examples of /ə/ will be found in the next chapter when we consider the *weak forms* of certain words, such as *at* and *for* in *ət taimz at times* and *fə ju: for you*.

5.2 Diphthongs

A diphthong is a glide from one vowel to another, and the whole glide acts like one of the long, simple vowels; so we have bi:/, ba:/, bɔ:/ and also bei, bəu, bai, bau, bɔi, bɪə, bəə, buə. The diphthongs of English are in three groups: those which end in /u/, /əu, au/, those which end in /i/, /eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ/, and those which end in /ə/, /ɪə, eə, ʊə/.

/əu, au/

Both these diphthongs end with /u/ rather than /u:/ although you will not be misunderstood if you do use /u:/. To get /əu/ as in səʊ so, start with /sə:/ and then glide away to /u/ with the lips getting slightly rounded and the sound becoming less loud as the glide progresses. Be sure that the first part of the diphthong is /ə:/ (a real English /ə:/!) and not /ɔ:/ or anything like it, and be sure that the sound is a diphthong, not a simple vowel of the /ɔ:/ type. /əu/ and /ɔ:/ must be kept quite separate. Try the following:

ləu	low	lɔ:	law	səʊ	so	sɔ:	saw
sneəʊ	snow	sno:	snore	bəʊt	boat	bɔ:t	bought
kləʊz	close	klɔ:z	claws	kəʊk	coke	kɔ:k	cork
kəʊl	coal	kɔ:l	call				

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For /au/ start with /ʌ/. Say tʌn ton, and then after the /ʌ/-sound add an /u/; this should give taʊn town. /au/ is not difficult for most people. Be sure that /au/ and /əu/ are different. Try the following:



nəʊ now
laʊd loud
faʊnd found
raʊ row (quarrel)
daʊt doubt
taʊnz towns

nəʊ know
laʊd load
faʊnd phoned
raʊ row (line)
daʊt dote
taʊnz tones

Remember when you practise these examples that diphthongs are shorter before strong consonants and longer before weak ones, just like the other vowels, so bəʊt boat has a shorter diphthong than kləʊz close and daʊt doubt a shorter one than laʊd loud. Go back over all those examples and get the lengths right. When no consonant follows, as in laʊ low, the diphthong is at its longest.

/eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ/

These diphthongs all end in /i/, not /i:/ (though it is not serious if you do use /i:/ finally). /eɪ/ begins with /e/ as in men and then add /i/ after /e/, gliding smoothly from /e/ to /i/ and making the sound less loud as the glide progresses this will give meɪn main. The most common mistake is to use a long, simple vowel, so try to be sure that there is a glide from /e/ to /i/; however, if you do use a simple vowel for /eɪ/ it will not be misunderstood some accents of English (e.g. Scottish) do the same. But /eɪ/ and /e/ must be quite separate. Try the following:



leɪt	late	let	let	seɪl	sail	sel	sell
peɪpə	paper	pepə	pepper	treɪd	trade	treɪd	tread
reɪk	rake	rek	wreck	feɪl	fail	fel	fell

/aɪ/ glides from /ʌ/ to /i/, and the loudness becomes less as the glide progresses. Say fʌn fun, and then add /i/ after the /ʌ/, with a smooth glide; this will give you faɪn fine. Be sure that /aɪ/ is separate from /eɪ/:



waɪt	white	weɪt	wait	laɪd	lied	leɪd	laid
raɪs	rice	reɪs	race	raɪz	rise	reɪz	raise
laɪk	like	leɪk	lake	faɪl	file	fel	fail

/ɔɪ/ glides from /ɔ:/ to /i/, and as usual the loudness becomes less during

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the glide. Say /dʒɔ:/ jaw and then add /ɪ/, as before. This will give you /dʒɔɪ/joy. The /ɔ:/ sound is not as long in /ɔɪ/ as it is when it is alone, as in /dʒɔ:/./ɔɪ/ is not a very common diphthong and it is not likely to be confused with any other vowel or diphthong. Try these words:

bɔɪ boy	tɔɪ toy	ənɔɪ annoy	nɔɪ noise
ɔɪl oil	dʒɔɪn join	əvɔɪ avoid	bɔɪlz boils
vɔɪs voice	hɔɪst hoist	dʒɔɪnt joint	lɔɪtə loiter

/ɪə, eə, ʊə/

These are all glides to the sort of /ə/-sound found in final position, as described on p. 83. /ɪə/ glides from /ɪ/ (not /i:/) to this /ə/ in words like hɪə hear, nɪə near, etc. If you do use /i:/ at the beginning of the glide it will sound a bit strange but you will not be misunderstood. Try the following:

ɪə ear	jɪə year	bɪə beer	kɪə clear
fɪə fear	rɪəl real	bɪəd beard	aɪdɪəz ideas
kərɪən Korean	fɪəs fierce	pɪəs pierce	nɪərə nearer
rɪəlɪ really			

Words such as fʌnɪə funnier and glo:riəs glorious, where /ɪə/ is the result of adding an ending /ə/ or /ɪə/ to a word which ends with /ɪ/, should be pronounced in the same way as the /ɪə/ in hear, near, etc. The same is true for words such as ɪndɪə India, eəriə area, ju:nɪən union, etc.

To make /eə/, start with the word hæz has (with the proper English /æ/, between /e/ and /ʌ/) and then add /ʌ/ after the /æ/, gliding smoothly from /æ/ to /ʌ/; this will give you the word heəz hairs.

Notice that the beginning of the diphthong is /æ/ rather than /e/. You must keep /ɪə/ and /eə/ quite separate; try the following:

hɪə here	heə hair	bɪə beer	beə bare
stɪəd steered	steəd stared	rəz ears	eəz airs
rɪəlɪ really	reəli rarely	wɪərɪ weary	wərɪ wary

/ʊə/ starts from /ʊ/ (not /u:/) and glides to /ə/; if you use /u:/ at the beginning of the glide it will sound a bit strange but you will not be misunderstood. Try the following:

pʊə poor	ɪnfjuərəns insurance
ʃʊəlɪ surely	kjʊərɪɒsətɪ curiosity
fjuərɪəs furious	kjʊə cure

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pjʊə pure	tuərist tourist
ʃʊə sure	pjʊəlɪ purely

All these words may also be pronounced with /ɔ:/ instead of /ʊə/ in R.P., /pɔ:/, /ʃɔ:/, /kɔ:/, etc. Other words, like fewer, bluer, continuous, are also usually pronounced with /ʊə/ fjuə, bluə, kəntɪnjuəs though they can always be pronounced with /u:ə/ fju:ə, blu:ə, kəntɪnju:əs – and in any case they must not be pronounced with /ɔ:/ This is also true for cruel and jewel which must have either /ʊə/ or /u:ə/.

5.3 Vowel sequences

There are vowel sequences as well as consonant sequences but they are not so difficult. In general, when one vowel (or diphthong) follows another you should pronounce each one quite normally but with a smooth glide between them. The most common sequences are formed by adding /ə/ to a diphthong, especially to /aɪ/ and /au/ in words like faiə fire and auə our. When you listen to these two sequences /aɪə, auə/ you will notice that the /ɪ/ in fire and the /ʊ/ in our are rather weak; in fact both sequences may sound rather like /a:/ It is probably best for you not to imitate this but to pronounce the sequences as /aɪ+ə/ and /au+ə/, though the /ɪ/ and the /ʊ/ should not be made too strong. Try the following:

taiə tyre	taʊə tower
traxəl trial	traʊəl trowel
kwaɪət quiet	taɪəd tired
kauəd coward	paʊəful powerful
baɪə buyer	baʊə bower
flaɪə flyer	flaʊə flower
aɪən iron	raɪət riot
auəz ours	ʃaʊərɪ showery

The less common sequences /eɪə, əʊə, ɔɪə/ should be pronounced with the normal diphthong smoothly followed by /ə/. The /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ need not be weakened at all. Try:

greɪə greyer	ɪmplɔɪə employer
grəʊə grower	θrəʊə thrower
pleɪə player	bitrɛɪəl betrayal
rɪəlɪ royal	laɪəz lawyers
fʊləʊəz followers	

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/i:/ and /u:/ are also followed by /ə/ in words like *freer* and *bluer* which may be pronounced *fri:ə* or *friə*, and *blu:ə* or *bluə*, as we have seen.

The verb ending *-ing* /ɪŋ/ gives various sequences in words like the following:

bɪ:ŋ	being	sɪ:ŋ	seeing
dʊ:ŋ	doing	stju:ŋ	stewing
əlaʊŋ	allowing	bauŋ	bowing
d्रɔ:ŋ	drawing	sɔ:ŋ	sawing
gəʊŋ	going	nəʊŋ	knowing

In words like *saying*, *enjoying*, *flying*, where *-ing* follows a word ending with /eɪ/, /ɔɪ/ or /aɪ/, it is common to pronounce *seɪŋ*, *ɪndʒɔɪŋ*, *flaɪŋ*, if you find this easier.

In words like *carrying*, *pitying*, etc., where a word which ends with /ɪ/ has /ɪŋ/ added to it, it is usual (and best for you) to pronounce *kæri:ɪŋ*, *piti:ɪŋ*, etc., although *kærɪ* and *pitrɪ* are the normal forms.

Other vowel sequences are found both within words and between words. These also should be performed with a smooth glide between the vowels. (See also p. 101.) Here are some examples:

kɛɪɒs	chaos	rʊɪn	ruin
bɪɒnd	beyond	rɪækt	react
blu:ʃ	bluish	greɪərd	grey-eyed
ði: end	the end	mai əʊn	my own

bəɪɒgrəfɪ biography

kəʊɒpəreɪt co-operate

ju:ənt you aren't

gəʊ aut go out

tu:əʊz two hours

meɪ əʊ ɪt tu:ju: may I owe it to you?

Exercises

- 3 Go back and practise all the examples given in this chapter, and concentrate on making *differences* between the different vowels.
- 4 Is the length of vowels important in your language? Practise making the difference between the long vowels (including the diphthongs) and the short vowels of English. Don't forget that vowel length is affected by following strong and weak consonants; complete the following list for all the vowels and practise it, thinking about vowel length:

bi:d	bi:t
hɪz	hɪs
sed	set

- 5 Make a list of phrases like the ones on p. 88, where a vowel or diphthong at the end of one word is immediately followed by another at the beginning of the next. Practise saying them smoothly, with no break between the vowels.

5.4 Exercises

(Answers, where appropriate, on p. 135)

- 1 What vowels and diphthongs do you have in your language? Which of the English ones cause you difficulty?
- 2 During your listening-time listen carefully to one of the difficult vowels at a time and try to get the sound of it into your head. Make a list of twenty words containing each difficult vowel and practise them.